

The Builder.

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THE snow-ball gathers as it rolls. The echoes of the cry for sanitary reform are heard from many places. Those who do not feel the necessity for it, because of want of knowledge, are beginning to join in the agitation, impelled by those who do; and before long, the demand being universal will be irresistible, and men will no longer be permitted to die by thousands before their time, or suffer the wholesale waste of happiness and wealth which has so long gone on. The cry is becoming fashionable,—it is to be hoped there will not be with the much cry, “little wool,”—and the newspapers record in every column lectures on health of towns, deaths from impure air, improvements in sewerage, reports of parishes on their own abominable condition, and “grand demonstrations in favour of a sound and comprehensive sanitary bill.”

Go into the provincial mechanics' institutions, and you will hear one lecturer say,—“Whilst men are interested in putting up half-a-dozen tenements where there is only space for two—whilst the population are crowded together in alleys, and lanes, and yards, without light, or air, or room, or water, or drains—whilst every sanitary law is neglected—every precaution set at nought, and all the ordinary injunctions of Providence disregarded—so long will there be high mortality, high poor-rates, and great suffering; and, unless the Government interfere, no effort of philanthropy, or exertions of individuals, can prevent, or even mitigate, the evils complained of. The dwellings of the poor, in addition to being surrounded by adverse circumstances, are often structurally bad—the walls are of insufficient thickness—the basement insufficiently elevated, and unprovided with the appliances which comfort and health require. The sites on which they are placed are frequently damp, low, marshy, and undrained; and so frail in their construction, that, were they to stand alone instead of being built in a line, they would almost certainly give way. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that disease prevails as it does amongst them—and that fever, rheumatism, ague, and debility, thin their ranks, and convert a hale and robust population into a pale, sickly, and diseased one. The State—whose pillars and support are the labouring classes—becomes enfeebled by a physically deteriorated people; and health, the greatest blessing and bulwark of nations as of individuals, can only be preserved by attention to those external circumstances on which the physical condition of man is dependent.”

And while this is being said in Southampton, another in London is shewing, that the waste of money caused by defective structural arrangements in the United Kingdom cannot be less than twenty millions sterling, the result of 20,000 deaths and 200,000 cases of unnecessary sickness,—and winding up a forcible address with such cheering anticipations as these:—“The measure announced in three successive speeches from the Throne, and brought forward in two successive Parliaments, will soon be again offered to your acceptance. How are you prepared to receive it? Happily,

whatever the fate of the measure, the sanitary cause is safe: it rests upon a foundation not to be shaken; it is firmly built upon Truth, Mercy and Justice. It may be resisted for a time; but it will assuredly triumph. Justice shall take the place of the spurious charity which now wears the garb of mercy; prevention shall be substituted for publication, and economy for waste; and the hideous form of vulgar and ignorant selfishness, red with all the blood shed from the foundation of the world, and dark with the accumulated miseries of mankind, shall be trodden under foot, while the radiant form of enlightened self-interest, upheld by law and liberty, prompted by charity, and guided by justice, will reascend her recovered throne, and rule over a world, the smiling abode of health, peace, and plenty.”

This delightful result, however, is still a long way off: its achievement will need many and continuous efforts,—efforts which for their own sake all are bound to assist in making. Again and again we must repeat that every person, whatever may be his station, is personally and *selfishly* interested in preserving the health not merely of his neighbours, but of all the world! If any doubt this, let them recall this one fact, that the cholera which reached England in 1831 broke out at Jessore, near Calcutta, in 1817, and destroyed 10,000 persons of all grades, through inattention to the miserable circumstances under which the parishes of that province lived! Those who throw obstacles in the way of measures to give good supplies of light, pure air, and good water, to all classes, may themselves fall beneath a fever, generated by the want of these requisites in an obscure court far away from their immediate neighbourhood.

Much, as we said, has to be done: look at the recent reports from Hackney, where two children were killed by the noxious vapours from an uncovered drain or accumulation of filth; from St. Andrew's, Holborn, and George-the-Martyr, where the health of the inhabitants is seriously threatened by the state of the cesspools; from Pimlico, close to the Palace, even worse; from the wealthy parish of Marylebone, and numerous other places.

The report from the last-named parish, Marylebone, takes a very formal shape, and is an important document, shewing the industry and acumen of the committee by whom it was drawn up. It points out that no fewer than 280 streets and ways are wholly without sewers, and remonstrates in strong terms against the constitution and management of the Sewers' Commission.

As to the abominable window-tax (the tax on light, health, and morality), the report says:—“Under the head of lighting, and in connection with the extreme importance of the subject, as regards all attempts at sanitary improvement, your committee cannot but call on the vestry most strenuously to urge once more upon the consideration of the Government and the Legislature the absolute necessity, if there be any thing like sincerity on the part of the proposers of sanitary measures, of repealing that most unjust and unequal and obnoxious tax, which places a heavy penalty on the formation of all openings for the admission of light and air, the free admission of which is indispensable to the maintenance of health. So long as the window-tax continues to render the habitation of all classes, and of the poor especially, gloomy, stagnant, and impure, no attempts at a partial remedy of minor evils can be attended with success. The remedy of this crying grievance is so simple,

and so completely within the power of the Legislature, that its continuance can only be regarded as a convincing proof of indifference to the most obvious and practical means of carrying out real measures of sanitary reform.” In respect of intramural burial, the committee come to the self-evident conclusion that the practice is too highly detrimental to the health of the surrounding neighbourhood, to be permitted to continue under a prudent system of sanitary regulations, and they show very good reasons why, with respect to St. John's grounds, in this parish, “the subject of further interment there will shortly require the most serious consideration of the vestry.” In the upper portion of this ground, containing about three acres, 42,542 bodies have been placed within the last twenty-four years!

Leaving this report for a while,—the question of burial in towns daily acquires additional importance in the eyes of all unprejudiced persons,—the necessity of its prevention more evident. The recent exposures relative to Enon Chapel, and other receptacles of the sort, have opened the eyes of the public to the enormity of the abuse, and have roused the indignation of the metropolitan and provincial press. A writer in the *Bridgewater Times*, who had specially visited the place, says forcibly:—

“Since the death of the proprietor, in 1839, no fresh burial has taken place; the property has passed into other hands, and the chapel, which was once used as a place of worship, is now turned into a dancing-hall, for the delight of those who can pay sixpence for a ticket. Over this charnel-house of corruption are these revelries held; and the malignant gases which permeate through every fissure, are inspired by the crowds who have nightly visited this nest-egg of corruption. In its neighbourhood fever is always in possession, and the mortality is fearful; but who has cared, or who cares for this? The poor wretches whose poverty compels them to locate there, are far too anxious to gain a livelihood to count the cost of health at which they obtain it. Death overtakes them—they perish, and in some neighbouring burial place they balance accounts with their survivors, by rotting, and dissemi-nating amongst them the same dangerous elements which cut them off before their time. And thus the game goes on: the living tread upon the dead, fill up their vacant places, and leave no blank; and, in their turn, the dead cut down the living. And who, we ask again, cares for these things? Were we to draw our conclusions from any appearance of actual reform in the system, we should answer, ‘No one.’ There is little evidence of a care for these things by any amendment for the better in the metropolis and the provinces. But yet, if we watch the growing movement, it evidences that there are some who care, who work and strive with perseverance and with energy to effect a reform in this particular. Sanitary reform is a popular subject. Improved sewerage, better ventilation, and facilities for bathing and washing, are the topics of the day; and valuable agents they each and all are in the great work of improvement. But what avails a better drainage, when the sewers only form a quicker vehicle for the transit of impure gases, which percolate through them from surrounding burial grounds? And what avails ventilation, when the air we breathe passes over, and is impregnated with the deadly vapours from a churchyard? What is the use, in fact, of attempting to purify the air, when the nuisance which poisons it remains, and increases daily and hourly?”

Mr. Savage Landor, in his “*Pericles and Aspasia*,” makes satirical reference to this abuse in a passage which, although it only refers to a part of the subject, and includes an abomination of another sort, we are led to quote. One of his characters is rehearsing the tales of a travelled friend, and says,—

“But Lysicles will appear to you to have assumed a little more than the fair privileges of a traveller in relating, that the people have